

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide documentation for the screening process used to determine which projects should be included in the No-Action Alternative and the cumulative impact analysis for the Programmatic Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) for the CALFED Bay-Delta Program (CALFED). The No-Action Alternative will provide a baseline with which to compare the effects of CALFED action alternatives. The report provides a description of the process used to screen potential water projects and programs sponsored by various agencies that could affect State Water Project (SWP) or Central Valley Project (CVP) operations and future CALFED actions. The next phase of the CALFED process is to define operational and regulatory requirements and modeling assumptions for the No-Action Alternative.

PURPOSE OF THE NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Both the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) require that an EIR or EIS include an examination of a No-Project or No-Action Alternative (references to these alternatives will be combined and stated as the No-Action Alternative). The No-Action Alternative can be defined in different ways, but it is essentially a scenario of what would happen to the environment if the proposed action were not implemented and existing trends and conditions continued into the future. The purpose of the No-Action Alternative is to provide a baseline for assessing the environmental impacts of the proposed alternatives and to disclose to the public and decision makers the environmental consequences of those alternatives. It is important to remember that the No-Action Alternative is only the basis for comparison of the potential consequences of implementing the alternatives. Therefore, including an action in or excluding it from the No-Action Alternative is not, in any way, intended to be a judgment regarding the merits of that action or an assessment of the likelihood that the action will be implemented in the future.

PURPOSE OF THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT ANALYSIS

In a NEPA and CEQA evaluation, it is required that the preferred alternative be evaluated with the combined effects of the cumulative actions in a single analysis. Cumulative impacts are defined by NEPA and CEQA as incremental impacts on the environment that would result from the proposed project in combination with other related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future

actions. The impacts of the related past and present actions will be identified as part of the discussion of existing conditions in the Programmatic EIR/EIS; therefore, this effort to identify a list of actions for the cumulative impact analysis focuses on potential future actions, particularly those that do not meet the criteria for inclusion in the No-Action Alternative.

PUBLIC WORKSHOP ON THE NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE AND CUMULATIVE IMPACT ANALYSIS

CALFED staff conducted a public workshop on July 11, 1996, to describe the approach used in developing the existing conditions, No-Action Alternative, and cumulative impact analysis for the CALFED Programmatic EIR/EIS. The purpose of the workshop was also to seek input and gain consensus from interested parties on the proposed approaches to developing the No-Action Alternative and cumulative impact analysis. Responses to comments received at the workshop and letters sent to CALFED from various parties on the impact assessment approaches are provided in Appendix A. The workshop was beneficial for both the CALFED team and the stakeholders, providing for refinement of the list of projects and criteria used to identify projects for inclusion in the No-Action Alternative and cumulative impact analysis.